

News Release



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Sussex County supports homeownership programs

GEORGETOWN, Del. – Sussex County officials are hopeful two grants awarded to local groups this week will help more residents achieve the American dream of homeownership.

At its Tuesday, Sept. 20, meeting, County Council approved \$39,000 in grants to two organizations that help low- and moderate-income residents find affordable, quality housing. Council granted \$20,000 to the National Council on Agricultural Life and Labor Research Inc., and \$19,000 to Sussex County Habitat for Humanity.

NCALL Research will use the \$20,000 grant for staff in its homeownership counseling program, said Karen Speakman, deputy director of the Delaware-based organization, which focuses mostly on aiding first-time homebuyers.

Sussex County Habitat for Humanity will use its \$19,000 grant to help cover infrastructure costs in a planned 19-home subdivision called Concord Village, just outside of Seaford. The project will be marketed toward needy families.

“We really appreciate Sussex County providing these funds,” said Speakman, whose organization helped 58 Sussex County families achieve homeownership in fiscal 2004. “Low-income people often don’t know how to go through the process of buying a home, and they get frustrated with it. We help to demystify that, and help them to become better-educated consumers.”

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Richard Faull, a member of the board of directors for Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, said the county's support puts his organization closer to realizing its vision of Concord Village. The organization has raised, or has commitments for, approximately \$685,000 of the project's \$2.1 million cost.

"We certainly enjoy the support we have had, and continue to have, from all of the Sussex County Council members," Faull said.

Sussex County already enjoys the greatest homeownership percentage of any county in Delaware, with more than 80 percent of the inhabited housing units in the county counted as owner-occupied. That's 14 percent above the national average, according to year 2000 data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Though the county's average of renter-occupied housing, 19.3 percent, is lower than the national average of 33.8 percent, county officials say programs like those supported by NCALL Research and Habitat for Humanity have the chance to bring that figure even lower – and put more Sussex residents into homes of their own.

"This is just another step in what we're trying to do to foster affordable housing in Sussex County," said County Council President Finley B. Jones Jr. of Greenwood. "As long as the county is prosperous, we should do whatever we can to help those residents who want to move into homeownership, but might need a little help along the way."

The grants council awarded this week came out of \$200,000 set aside in the fiscal 2006 budget for community development fund projects. Half of that money is earmarked for housing rehabilitation emergencies not covered by the federal Community Development Block Grants program; the rest is intended for groups that focus on housing issues.

Other recipients have included the Delaware Housing Coalition and the Milford Housing Development Corp., each of which received \$28,000.

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